

Showing Market Rabbits Starter Guide.



Overview:

Preparing for and showing livestock can be an extremely rewarding and educational experience for youth. The lessons learned in showing and raising livestock are invaluable. However, it can feel very intimidating to begin. This guide is a broad overview at how to prepare for showing market rabbits. All exhibitors are encouraged to ask questions as they grow through the program.



How to prepare for purchasing your animal:

Proper housing and good equipment are vital in having a successful rabbit project. When looking at setting up the space in which your rabbits will be housed, it important to make sure the animals are comfortable and that you will be able to easily handle them. The first thing to consider is the hutch or cage. You want one that allows for the rabbits to receive fresh air and sunlight. It should protect your rabbits from bad weather, other animals, and provide enough space for growth and exercise. You also can purchase a cage if you are keeping your rabbit indoors. Each individual rabbit should have a space at least 36" wide x 30" deep x 18" high. Hutches and cages should remain clean for the rabbits. Second, you want to think about the feeders you want to use in your hutches. You can use a feed crock, trough, hopper or an outside mounted self-feeder. Make sure whatever feeder you chose will minimize waste of food and contamination from soil and manure. For watering, you can use a water bottle or an automatic waterer. Crock waterers or bowls pose a risk of easily being spilled and leaving your rabbit thirsty. Water should be clean daily.



Purchasing your animal:

Californian and New Zealand are two of the most popular meat rabbit breeds. Meat pens and single fryers can be exhibited at the Jeffco 4-H Fair, though pens must be consisted of the same breed and variety. Rabbits must be under 70 days old and must weight between 3.5 and 5.5 pounds at weigh-in. Market rabbits are generally acquired in late May or June , but must be in possession by June 15 and identified on 4HOnline by July 9.



Feeding your Animal:

There are many feeds available for your market rabbits. Many commercially available feeds are considered complete feeds and have a lot of the nutrients rabbits need. It is recommended that commercial rabbit feeds contains 16 to 18 percent protein. Your rabbit should never run out of food. Offer 1/2 cup of pelleted feed twice daily. Adjust your feeding amount so that there is a little bit of feed remaining at each feeding. Leaving an abundance of feed out will cause the pellets to draw moisture, leading to mold. Ask your breeder, leader or fellow exhibitors for feed recommendations. Check the label and make sure the first ingredient is either Forage Products or a type of hay. Avoid giving any fruits, vegetables, or leafy greens. They can cause diarrhea. You can feed hay by the handful to provide fiber to the diet.

Water access is extremely important and is directly related to feed intake. The water source should be clean, fresh and abundant at all times.



Handling Your Rabbits

Proper handling is important for both the safety of you and your rabbits. Before handling, it is important to spend time with them and build a relationship. Regular interactions are important to show the animal that you are good and deserving of their trust. You can sit by their hutch or cage and pet them. Allow them to get used to your smell and voice before handling them. Lift the rabbit up from underneath, supporting the chest with one hand and the rear with the other hand. The back feet should be flat in the palm of your hand or held between your fingers. The rabbit's head should be tucked into the crook of your elbow or armpit area. Rabbits may wiggle a lot at first. You can start by holding them while sitting if you are nervous about dropping them. They may kick, scratch or bite at first. If they do, you may want to spend more time with them getting used to you. Do not take your frustrations out on your animal. Trust can be difficult or impossible to get back if you break it by hitting or yelling at your animal.



Preparing for a Show

It is important to read the rules of any show before going. The rules for the Jeffco 4-H Fair are in the Fairbook. Rabbits will be judged based of breed standards. You will need to practice getting your rabbit ready for inspection during shows. At least 6 weeks prior to your show, begin working with your rabbits regularly. This includes brushing your rabbits, rubbing their hair coat to remove excess fur and training the rabbit to sit still on the show table. Set a towel down on a table and practice setting them down. Gently keep your hands on them until they are used to it. You will need to practice putting the rabbit in various positions for the show. It is recommended that you attend an in person practice or watch tutorials online to be prepared.



Preparing for Showmanship

Before showmanship, you will want to be knowledgeable about basic anatomy, common health concerns, and the breed of your rabbit. You are showing off your gain in knowledge and your comfort with your rabbits! This is why it is important to build trust with your animals for weeks beforehand.



Materials for Show Preparation

- Table
- Paper towels
- Towel or carpet square
- Canine Nail Trimmers
- Dish Towel or rag

Preparing your rabbit's coat for the show should start a month or more before the show. You will want to get the rabbit damp by using your hands and a cup or bowl of water, then stroke them to get dead hair off of them. Always brush from head to tail. Before the show, it is important to have your rabbits clean and presentable. However, it is dangerous to give them baths or to wash them under a hose or hydrant because they can go into shock easily. Take a bucket with soapy water and a rag to clean spots of dirt or manure off them. Also wipe down ears with a paper towel but make sure that you do not go too deep in the ear or allow water to drip into the ear. You also will want to make sure the nails of the rabbit are not exceptionally long. Trim long nails with trimmers but be careful to avoid the quick (the pink part of the nail supplying blood).



Common Health Concerns

- Lice and mites: In most cases, treatment is simple, but left untreated an external parasite infestation can lead to serious skin problems. The first symptoms include itchy skin, dandruff and hair loss. Treat with topical medication.
- Enteritis: A digestive tract disease that presents with diarrhea and weight loss, enteritis is caused by a bacteria in the digestive tract that flourishes when the rabbit is stressed. Stress can be caused by outside animals or noises or switching feed abruptly. Young rabbits are the most at risk. Limit stress and watch stool after a stressful event (can take a week to show symptoms).
- Upper Respiratory Disease: Often caused by pasteurellosis, it causes sneezing, snotty eyes/nose, fast breathing, a reduced appetite and weight loss. Fluoroquinolone antibiotics are generally effective but must be prescribed by a vet.
- Wry Neck: Wry neck makes a rabbit's neck twist, causing the head to tilt sideways and will cause involuntary movement of the eyes. It is usually caused by middle ear infections which can be treated with antibiotics if caught before wry neck sets in.
- Intestinal Worms: Intestinal worms can cause loss of appetite, lower weight gain, skin irritations and more. You can prevent worms by keeping cages clean. If you suspect worms you can use a dewormer to get rid of them.



Expected Project Expenses

Livestock projects can really add up in cost. It is important to ensure that you can afford your project before buying animals. It also is important to consider what you are likely to make from your project to offset the cost. Below is a breakdown:

Cost of purchasing your animal: \$5-40/rabbit

Cost of feed:

Show Rabbit Pellet Feed (1 bag): \$30 (appx cost of 50 lb bag of feed)

Timothy Hay (1 bag): \$20

Total cost of feed: \$50 (will likely feed 2 rabbits) = \$25/rabbit

Cost of vet/health: \$20/rabbit (estimation but should be budgeted into figure)

Supplies: \$50/rabbit (estimation but should be budgeted into figure)

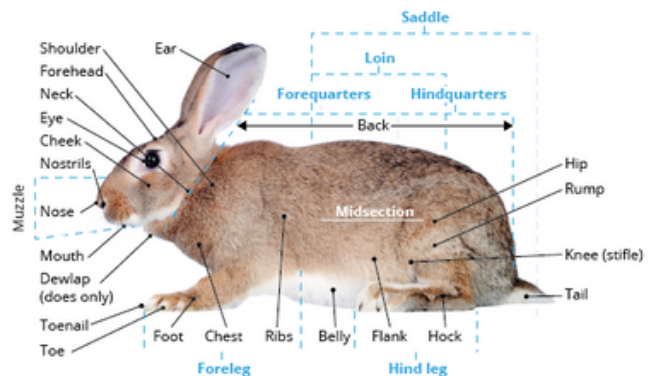
Total Cost: \$100-140/rabbit

Approximate Jeffco 4-H Sale Price (Auction or Private Treaty): \$200-500/trio



Selecting a Rabbit

Do a health check to make sure the teeth are correct. Check to make sure they have all their toenails. Make sure the tail is straight. Make sure it does not have a hernia. Also make sure that the rabbit meets the breed characteristics set by the Standard of Excellence.



Sources and Resources

- https://ohio4h.org/sites/ohio4h/files/imce/animal_science/Rabbit%20Showmanship%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf
- <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/vetscience/documents/clinical-skills/Rabbit%20Handling.pdf>
- <https://texasyouthlivestock.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Rabbit-Explore-Project-Guide.pdf>
- <https://morrow.osu.edu/sites/morrow/files/imce/Raising%20Market%20Rabbits.pdf>
- <https://ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/4h-31>



Adapted from Phillips County (Jessie Salyards, 4-H Specialist)

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